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TERRELL'S TUNE-UP

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pop cd reviews

Hail, conquerors

This probably sounds corny, but I didn't really start to appreciate **The Dictators**' compilation ***Every Day Is Saturday*** until I heard it in my car going 85 mph (oops, I mean whatever the speed limit is) on the Interstate with my windows open.

Corny, but true. It's that kind of album.

The Dictators' first album was released in 1975, sometime between the point that the New York Dolls were crashing and The Ramones were gestating.

The Dics, as their fans call them, were a little more polished than the Dolls, The Ramones, and the other punk groups they inspired. You can hear a definite Who influence (check the classic Townshend riffage on "Baby Let's Twist"). And a little more metallic. Guitarist Ross "The Boss" Funichello later joined Manowar, and one of their early bass players later enlisted with Twisted Sister. The Dics used Blue Oyster Cult producers Sandy Pearlman and Murray Krugman (though I don't hear the cowbell).

The Dics had that good old American trash-rock spirit — singing songs of beer, pizza, girls, pro wrestling, and other things that make this country great. Frontman Handsome Dick Manitoba was obnoxious in the best possible way (he started out as a roadie with the band); Funichello and guitarist Scott "Top 10" Kempner were loud but seemingly conscious of every note of rock history; and bassist Andy Shernoff wrote some amazing tunes.

Every Day Is Saturday, released early this year on Norton Records, is a collection of demos and rarities — there are even a few radio ads. The album should appeal to longtime fans of the band as well as to youngsters who need to be introduced to the music. There are lots of stripped-down versions of The Dics' "greatest hits" (as if this stuff ever received decent radio play) from albums like *The Dictators Go Girl Crazy*, *Manifest Destiny*, and *Bloodbrothers* and other inspired Dictation.

It's mainly original material here, though there are a few cover songs like The Rivieras' classic "California Sun" (including one lyric alteration I won't even try to get away with in a family newspaper), The Ramones' "I Just Want to Have Something to Do" (available on download versions only), and, yes, fellow patriots, "America the Beautiful" (although for some reason they leave out the "God mend thine ev'ry flaw" refrain).

One of my favorite tunes is "Minnesota Strip" — an ode to teenage prostitution that features a great '70s metal riff. Then there's "Borneo Jimmy," a basic Chuck Berry-informed rocker about a guy "Standing by the ringside/Cheering on the bad guys."

"Master Race" has nothing to do with Nazis. Sample lyrics: "My favorite part of growing up/Is when I'm sick and throwing up/It's the dues you've got to pay/For eating burgers every day."

The Dictator philosophy might best be summed up by "16 Forever" — a wish for eternal teenager bliss. There are two versions of the song on *Every Day Is Saturday*.

Unfortunately there are some clunkers here.

I'm on the fence about "I Stand Tall" — loving and hating it. I appreciate the faux jingoism ("You can circle the globe to find a better land/Lots of movie stars if you're a movie star fan/Lots of pizza, ice cold Coke/Johnny Carson telling jokes/And lots and lots of American good good girls.") But unfortunately the music, with its terse piano and staid guitar parts, anticipates cheesy '80s AOR. Could this song be the secret origin of Night Ranger?

Even worse is "Sleepin' With the TV On," an actual pop ballad with jangly guitar and overly sincere crooning. I dunno, it might appeal to fans of Dan Hill's "Sometimes When We Touch."

But that's why God created the skip button. *Every Day Is Saturday* is still a good album to take out on the highway. Check out nortonrecords.com and thedictators.com.

Also recommended

▼ ***Saving Grace*** by **Scott Kempner**. "Top 10" didn't stay 16 forever.

Even though he still looks like a rockin' rebel, the guy grew up. This album, his first solo record in 16 years or so, ain't kid stuff. Most of it's pretty mellow, though not in a sappy way. Kempner, who served time with The Del-Lords, an influential roots-rock band in the '80s, has a rugged, world-weary voice. One critic called him an East Coast Dave Alvin. His voice isn't nearly as deep, but that's not a half-bad comparison.

Maybe I've been listening to too much Dictators lately, but my favorite songs here are "Stolen Kisses" and "The Secret Everybody Knows," which are about the only all-out rockers on the album.

But there are some quieter gems too. Kempner co-wrote "Heartbeat of Time" with one of his heroes — Dion, with whom Kempner has worked in a band called the Little Kings. (For the record, Fern Castle also shares in songwriting credits on the song). It's got a 1950s Latin rhythm and has the feel of some forgotten Drifters hit. Dion lends some vocals at the end of the tune.

The only cover song on the album is an acoustic ballad called "I'll Give You Needles," written by alt-country rocker Tommy Womack. And it's a dandy. It's a terrible story of a junkie friend going downhill — though the singer offers hope that the junkie will get better so he can make her understand what she put everyone through.

Check out myspace.scottkempner.

▼ ***We Won't Change Our Style*** by **Hollywood Sinners**. Good old American garage rock is alive and well in Spain. These sinners, who come not from Hollywood but Toledo (holy Toledo!) prove it. It's a guitar-bass-drums trio that sounds like it wants to conquer the world.

Nothin' fancy here. You can hear traces of "I'm Not Your Stepping Stone" in the opening track "Wild Man" and on the last song "Tame Me" — and come to think of it, the same chord pattern is used on "Adictos al Ye-Ye" — but somehow the musicians still make it sound fresh.

They pay tribute to another Spanish band — Wau y los Arrrghs!!! — on a hopped-up cruncher called "Quiero Ser Como Wau y los Arrrghs!!!"

This album is one of the newest products from Dirty Water Records, a nifty little British label associated with a nightclub by the same name. It's the home of Los Peyotes (an Argentine garage group) Thee Exciters, The Priscillas, and other groups.

Check out dirtywaterrecords.co.uk and myspace.com/hollywoodsinners. ◄

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